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CAPE COD SEA REMINISCENCES

G. V. C.

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CAPE COD SEA REMINISCENCES, G. V. C.

In reading the daily press and noticing the comments and reports therein under the head of News of the Waterfront, it is observed that as the prelude to each and every report stands the initials that show the shipping to be under a foreign flag. To one of many, who has been a humble factor in the merchant marine of his country, this question will unbidden arise:

What has become of the American ship?

Where are those who once manned them?

The latter question is comparatively easy to answer. Many; yes, a greater number of them have crossed the Great Divide, and, let us hope, are resting in the Harbor of Heaven. Those yet remaining are but waiting the Pilot's summons, when they too must answer the eternal roll call.

In reading some of the above stated reports the gates of memory will but open to days gone by—to days when our country could boast of a merchant marine; to days when the United States led the world by half a million tons in merchant marine. The New England states were the center of shipbuilding; Massachusetts and Maine furnished two-thirds of the bone, muscle and brain that built, managed and sailed those ships.

The cause of the decline of the American merchant marine to near extinction has been threshed out by the press, and from the floor of Congress down to the corner store; but to those whom it has affected it is as vivid as was the handwriting on the wall:

Lack of national pride, that once was the breastwork of our country; the introduction of foreign pauper labor and foreign officials, and last but not least, railroad control; and when railroads control shipping, either by officials or by capital, in the words of the late Evangelist Sam Jones when calling his hearers to repentance, "Repent, or with you it will be 'Goodbye, John'."

The master's judgment counts for naught; the three sailors "L. L. L.," namely "Lead, Log and Lookout," are a myth. The orders of railroad management and the average trans-Atlantic steamship company defy the omnipotent and are a direct challenge to the elements in which they move. The master, who once was king in his own right when at sea, is now but a pilot, so to speak. He leaves his

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home office with his pockets filled with sailing orders: how to steer and how fast to go and where to go. "Make that time or you forfeit your position;" the lives of your passengers are naught to our interests. Result: a Titanic ocean horror.

Many of the rising generation of today have no correct knowledge of the part Cape Cod so manfully accepted and nobly carried to a success,—the American merchant marine.

There was a well-known saying that the average Cape Cod boy goes from the cradle to the sea, and when the mother found her boy big enough to haul a brick with a half-inch rope attached hand over hand, sailor fashion, up and into the chamber window he was big enough to go to sea. And to sea he went, with ambition to go from the hawse pipes to the quarterdeck.

In these modern days the American boy has no calling for the sea; he will tell you (in all truth) that there is nothing in it. He therefore takes to the baseball field, because there is "more money in it."

Then, again, we have no ships. Steam has driven the once famous clipper ship from the seas. "Wind and canvass make the true sailor." Reef-hand and steer and obey orders was his sea Bible, and the marlin-spike his text book.

With modern steam and electricity, sailors are not required. In their place are what are known as "rouseabouts" or "deckswabs"—the last act of a British Parliament, the seventy-second act of our American Congress or the decision of some Western judge for "his text book."

When sailing ships were built, safety for life and property as well as speed was driven into them with every bolt, and seamen handled them. With modern ships in ocean service, the bow and stern may resemble a ship, but the midship secion is but a ten story hotel, with elevators in the center; those in command have a string of letters tacked onto their names, both as a badge of servitude and for supposed safety. And the end of ocean horrors is not yet.

R. B. Forbes, who was a big factor in our country's merchant marine, was reported to have once said, "I would not be at all surprised if, when the North Pole is discovered, a Cape Cod man will be found there fishing." As Dr Cook made no report of any find of that nature the prophecy has not been verified. But this much we have ample proof of: there is no part of the world that can be reached by water that has not been visited by or where a son of Cape Cod has not placed his foot; and nobly have the daughters of Cape Cod gone side by side with husband and father—the wife sharing the husband's hardships as well as his success—in every part of the world where civilization has made it possible for her to go.

In the year 1858, the writer, then a boy, was on a sailing ship in

Callao, Peru. A large fleet of American ships was laying there awaiting charters. They came from different parts of the world, "seeking." It was a year doubtless remembered by many to this day as one of hard times for commerce.

The Fourth of July came, and our ship was selected on which to celebrate the day. At the banquet table were seated sixty-four. In answer to the toast "Sweethearts and wives on Cape Cod," twenty-eight masters of ships at that port stood at attention. Every town on Cape Cod from Chatham to Barnstable, both on the north and south sides, was represented; and beside eight of the above number, with the beauty and dignity of queens, as they were, stood their wives. Chatham, Brewster, North and East Dennis, Hyannis, Yarmouth and Barnstable were represented by the daughters of Cape Cod. Should they yet be counted with the living and the above reach their eye, possibly they may remember the little boy who was detailed by them to look after their little ones, with which three of them were blessed.

In the year 1888 the writer was detached from his command by the late Collis P. Huntington and ordered to London, there to take command of a steamship purchased by the company for the China and trans-Pacific route. I was ordered to deliver her at San Francisco. As she was foreign built, yet ship and cargo owned by Americans, I was forced to place her under a foreign flag. My route was via Suez canal, calling at Singapore, Hong Kong and Honolulu, and as I had placed my ship under the Hawaiian flag I called at the latter port for a permanent register.

On my arrival at Hong Kong I found my agent there—a typical Englishman—was connected with a trans-Pacific line of steamships. My ship being under a foreign flag he accepted it for a fact that I was of his nationality, as "none but the English can command ships." One day I invited him to dine with me on board my ship. As an inducement (knowing the feelings of the average Englishman when food is the subject) I informed him I had on board three French cooks selected in London for their skill. With all the dignity imaginable he replied, "Captain, I shall expect you to dine with me tomorrow. My wife is a New England woman, sir; she can grace the kitchen as well as the parlor. I shall ask her to prepare something I daresay you never enjoyed—I never until Mrs H. became my wife—a New England dinner."

Silence for one moment reigned. The French cooks vanished. "I accept your invitation, sir," I replied.

The morrow came and with it one poor hungry mortal. On arrival at Mr H.'s home I found that Mrs H. had taken charge of her kitchen. Her Chinese servants were bidden to obey orders, and Mrs H. surely had awaiting her guest a New England dinner such

as our mothers used to give us.

During the conversation at the table I asked Mrs H. what part of New England she claimed by birth, and I was not surprised when she replied, "Massachusetts." A light had slowly dawned on me, "They carry the marks in word and gesture." To the further question of "What part of Massachusetts?" With a slight toss of the head that spoke plainer than words the pride she held in the land of her birth, Mrs H. replied, "Cape Cod." Again the question, "What part of Cape Cod?" Evidently by her face a light was dawning on her, for with a half look of expectation she answered, "East Dennis." Arising from my chair I made the best Chesterfieldian bow I knew how to make and replied, "West Harwich! At your service, Mr H."

I met Mr H. several times in later years at the same port, and he never forgot to relate how he invited a Down East Yankee, as he termed me, to his home in order to surprise him with a New England dinner. It appears Mrs H. had visited Hong Kong with her parents on a sailing ship and there met her future husband.

Cape Cod men can be found in all parts of the world. They never lose their love for the place of their birth, and if the ocean or some foreign land is not their last resting place, as the years pass and age places them on the shelf of usefulness, their desire to return to the place where they first saw light predominates.

Twice during the writer's career has he had the conceit taken out of him when he was egotistic enough to think he was the first Cape Cod man to place his foot in certain parts of the earth.

In 1863 I was officer on a ship that entered the port of Japan, which had then been open to commerce but a few days. The ship I was attached to was under the British flag. But one vessel, a brig, was laying in the harbor, and she flew the American flag. "Of course," thought I, "there cannot be a Cape Cod man on her." I was detailed to go on shore (after permission had been given by the shore officials) to make some purchases for ship's use. I will not deny that my hat was just a trifle to one side as I walked up from my boat with native Japs staring in wonder at me, doubtless to see if I had horns or a cloven foot. "The first," I thought, "from my section of the state!"

Looking to the right in the center of a group of low thatched huts, I saw this sign in English,

Ship Stores.

I entered the hut, so called, and found that its owner was a native of Hyannis, and the captain and first mate of the brig in the harbor were natives of Chatham. My hat went to its proper place and I just "faded away."

Again, one year later, I was chief officer on an American ship in the port of Yiloilo, Philippine Islands. We were informed but three ships had touched at that port previous to ours, one being an English ship. But one white man was there, the

U. S. commercial agent, a native of Boston. In due time I was invited to visit the shore and requested to write my name in the agent's book, which I did with pleasure, signing name, state, town and with an extra flourish adding Cape Cod. Laying aside the pen, I exclaimed, "The first Cape Cod man in this section!" "I think not," said the agent, "turn the leaf of that book back, please." I did so, and there in bold and plain English was written, "—— ——, Chatham, U. S. of America, clipper ship Mountain Wave." I did not "fade away," but I just "wilted" and then and there determined never again to allow my conceit to lead me to believe I was the first son of Cape Cod to place my feet on any part of our Creator's green earth before any other Cape Cod man.

The word skipper is of English coinage and was given to the masters of fishing boats in the North of England. It found its way here and was given to the masters of our fishing schooners. The title of Captain was given to those who commanded vessels that sailed the ocean.

Modern usages assisted by our sagegrass statesmen have driven our ships from the sea, our ex-presidents adding the finish by granting that title to doctors and machinist engineers; the former known on shipboard as "Pills," the latter as "underground savages." Yet they are now Captains and Admirals.

One is compelled to repeat the words of the old sailor who was trying to navigate one of the streets near the waterfront the day after his arrival from sea, with as usual at that time of day, a heavy cargo on board. With a lurch to the leeward he collided with an apple stand. An old lady, the owner—an ex-stewardess—seizing him by the shoulder quickly turned him around and shouted, "Tack ship, Jack, and deepen your water." Looking at her for a moment he answered, "What do you know about tacking ship?" "Short yarns, my man," she replied, "Heave ahead. Ten voyages across the Western ocean." And Jack hove ahead, with an extra hitch of his clothing, muttering as he went, "What in — is the American merchant marine coming to!"

Seldom do we meet men who will not admit that sometime in their early days they had a desire to go to sea. There was something about the bounding billow that was fascinating to their young minds.

The late Jay Gould, when a guest on board J. P. Morgan's yacht Corsair, once said to the writer, "Why, Captain, in my young days I had a strong desire to go to sea, and many times since then I have wished I had." Had I been J. P. Morgan I could have answered him, but being a servant of his for the moment, I could but remain silent.

The average Cape Cod boy of days gone by had committed to memory before he had his evening

prayer that song so familiar to landsman as well as seaman:

Life on the ocean wave,
A home on the rolling deep,
Where the scattered waters rave,
The winds their revels keep.

If he had taken to the sea with the luring words of that song in his ears and followed that calling, before he had reached manhood he had learned by experience the answer to it, which says in part:

The man that wrote that song,
He never had been to sea;
He never a gale had seen
But upon his mother's knee.

Every town on the Cape furnished its full quota of builders, owners and masters. On the north side up to Barnstable we have the names of Knowles, Howes, Freeman, Sears and Taylor, with a Crowell thrown in here and there in order to make stowage. These men in the fifties commanded the finest fleet of clipper ships the world ever produced. Their name was legion.

On the south side from Chatham to Hyannis, the former held the lead for many years in what is known as deep water captains. All sections but one of Harwich furnished its masters; the west section its deep water quota. Many of them are in the writer's memory at the moment. All of them commanded different ships, but I will only name one or more that come to memory as I write:

Isaiah Chace, ships Starlight and Orpheus. His son, Edwin Chace, ship Black Prince. Lost at sea. Refused to abandon his ship. No further tidings.

Thomas L. Snow, ships Camallia, Hercules and Ringleader, the latter in her time a famous clipper.

Thomas Ellis, ship Maverick and others.

Thomas Snow, 2d, bark J. W. Seaver.

The following was endorsed on the J. W. Seaver register when on a voyage from Boston to the Amoor river, Siberia, during our Civil war:

"The American bark J. W. Seaver was this day boarded by the Confederate steamer Georgia, and satisfactory evidence being given that most of her cargo belongs to the Russian government she is ransomed with the sum of $16,000.00 and allowed to proceed on her voyage." A hundred or more prisoners, the crews of ships destroyed by the Georgia, were placed on board the bark, to be disposed of as the master deemed best. They were landed at Rio de Janeiro.

After endorsing the register, Captain Snow, seeing the name of Lieutenant Maurey, recognized in him on old school fellow when at their home in Fredericksburg, Va., and asked him, "Maurey, how would you trade jack knives?" Maurey looked up and replied, "Tom Snow!" "Yes, Tom Snow; I am the fellow." With more exchange of schoolday stories, they parted, Maurey saying, "This is the fortune of war."

Lieutenant Maurey will be remembered by seamen as once at

the head of the hydrographic office in Washington. The delay of going into Rio de Janeiro, and meeting a typhoon in the China sea and losing some spars and sails, when Captain Snow put into the port of Shanghai for repairs, prevented the bark from getting to the Amoor river before it was closed with ice. Therefore the bark was detained nine months until the next season. The American consul at Shanghai copied the endorsement from ships, and later on handed it to the captain's son, Alexander F. Snow, who was at that port commanding bark Japan, then in the San Fransico and China trade. In the later years Captain Snow built the three masted schooner Maggie Andrews, making many voyages to South America.

Remark Chase, 2d, bark Garead.

Martin L. Chase, schooner Central America and bark Garead. Later on Captain Chase made a voyage to the East Indies in schooner Henry Lippett (three masted) and as far as the writer can learn was one of the first to make a voyage of that kind in a vessel of that rig. At 87 years, to all appearance he is able to duplicate that voyage.

Benajah Crowell, Jr., ship Wild Rover.

W. B. Crowell, bark Wild Gazelle.

Erastus Crowell, ship Golden Rule, lost at sea; later on in steamer Dianna (no tidings).

Uriel Doane, ship Fleetwing.

Lewis B. Doane, bark Ralph M. Haywood.

Franklin S. Doane, bark New Light.

Isaac M. Bearse, ship Centennial.

James G. Baker, ship Kenilworth.

Horace N. Berry, ship George M. Barnard.

David Kelley, ship Robinhood and others.

Anthony Kelley, ship Lizzie Oakford.

J. G. Parks, a successful captain on many ships, now on Standard Oil company's ship Acme.

Nehemiah D. Kelley, ship Osborn Howes.

James Berry, ship Hercules.

Henry C. Berry, ship Golden State.

Benjamin F. Chase, ship Ackbar.

Gustavus Kelley. Captain Kelley built and sailed three different vessels, namely, schooners Charles H. Trickey, Thomas B. Garland and the J. Frank Seavey. The latter he sailed for twenty-two years, from Maine to Mexico.

Judah Berry, Jr., bark Gray Eagle.

Horatio Kelley, ship Eagle Wing.

Osmyn Berry, schooner Jonathan Bourne (four masted). Now commanding steamer Essex.

Benjamin Chace, schooner Hattie M. Crowell.

Horatio Chapman, bark Spotless.

Edwin F. Taylor, bark General Fairchild.

Isaiah C. Kelley, bark Macon. Lost at sea. No tidings.

Alfred Nickerson, bark Ira Seaver.

A great many of the above have passed on to their reward, leaving behind them the record of some of Cape Cod's famous ship masters. Not only did they command their ships, but they superintended their construction and were part owners.

Many of them who lived to see the decline of the deep water ship turned their ability to our coastwise commerce that included every port from Maine to Mexico. Many went into the foreign trade, showing to the world the finest fleet of three, four and five masted vessels that ever floated.

When they in turn noted the encroachment of railroads and foreign tramp ships, many gave up the sea. Those remaining turned to steam. In the words of one captain, "I was tired of hearing a boom tackle block jingle over my head."

Seamen as a rule are classed by landsmen in street parlance as "tough characters." Granted, for there never was a class or body of people that all were white, yet the average landsman can give the sailor nine points in a ten point game of toughness and then beat him.

Rough in exterior to all appearance, yet under the heavy jacket beats a heart that never will turn from a flag union down, showing distress. This is part of his life training. Broad minded from his intercourse with the world, taught by that intercourse not to interfere with anyone's creed, be it what it may, he learns to respect all creeds, or in other words, to steer his own ship and allow others to do the same.

In the writer's whole career in every port of the world, he never met but one Atheist in the full sense of that word. It is next to an impossibility for a sailor to be an Atheist, from the nature of the elements in which he moves.

Lieutenant Maurey once paused in pacing the deck (for he was a great seeker after light) and turning to a quartermaster nearby he said, "Bob, do you believe there is a God?" "Yes, sir," said Bob. "Why do you believe there is a God?" asked the lieutenant. Bob standing at attention, paused for a moment as if to collect himself to answer, and said, "Because, sir, I see His handiwork in every movement of the sea; I feel His presence in every breeze that fans my cheek." The lieutenant was answered. The sailor may not be a professor or a possessor, yet when questioned will say in all sincerity that he hopes to meet his Pilot face to face when he must cross the bar.

G. V. C.

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